

Enlightenment Jewish Style: The Haskalah Movement in Europe

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A result of the economic, social, and cultural change in the 18th century, the Haskalah emerged as the movement that brought the European Enlightenment to the Jewish world. Its supporters, the so-called Maskilim, were active in various fields: in philosophy, education, culture, economics, politics and, last but not least, religion. Transformation reached the individual European Jewish communities at various times and in various ways. The movement began in Western Europe, pioneered by the Berlin philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. It spread eastwards to Galicia and was developed further in Russia. Supported by a few Christian thinkers, and encouraged by "Enlightened despots" who wanted to assimilate their minority populations, the Maskilim tried, until the late 19th century, to harmonize the adherence to the Jewish religion and tradition with integration into the European societies.

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Enlightenment Jewish Style

During the 18th century traditional Jewish society underwent a cultural crisis because of a process of fragmentation, the main symptom of which was the decline of rabbinical authority. The attempt to find an answer to this crisis led to the formation of various competing movements: Haskalah, Hasidism (→ [Media Link #ab](#)), the traditionalism of the followers of Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo (1720–1797) (→ [Media Link #ac](#)), the Gaon of Vilnius (which were called the *Mitnaggedim* or "opponents" [of Hasidism]). The interaction of these movements must be regarded as the main phenomenon of Jewish modernity.

▲ 1

The Haskalah – literally "education" (the root word is related to the Hebrew "s-k-l", which means "to act with understanding") – marks a turning point in Jewish history whose effects, in a second and more diverse stage, extended into Eastern Europe, far beyond its spiritual birthplace in Prussia. If the Berlin philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) (→ [Media Link #ad](#)), who translated the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, into German, pioneered the movement, the legal framework began in France with the contemporary European process of Emancipation (→ [Media Link #ae](#)): On 27 September 1791 the *Assemblée constituante* granted Jews full citizenship.

▲ 2

Naturally, the world of the Ashkenazim (→ [Media Link #af](#)), united by traditional ways of life and customs which structured space and lent a unique rhythm to the passing of time, continued to exist¹ so that, for a part of the Jewish population, religious and social life remained closely connected. But others struggled against religion and tradition and advocated a new definition of Jewish society.

▲ 3

Because of the Haskalah, modernity was seen as a real challenge by the Jewish minority. It raised many burning questions: Adherence to or loss of traditional ways of life, decisions for or against "emancipation" and "assimilation" (and would not the former lead automatically to the latter?), as well as the question of adapting religion and religious practices to the modernization of society. The Jewish community had to choose a form of integration.

▲4

Since in France and Germany the Jewish population was a small minority, but in Central and Eastern Europe constituted a rather large minority, the Haskalah had to pass through various forms and diverse stages in which its original teachings and practices underwent nuanced changes as they were adapted and revised.

▲5

However, everywhere the goals of the proponents of the Haskalah were the same: to lead the Jews out of the religious ghetto, to integrate the Jewish world into the non-Jewish world and to bring separation to an end in favour of non-Jewish tendencies, customs and knowledge. The pre-requisites for such integration were modernisation and ending the centuries-old blending of religious and social life.

▲6

The Haskalah pursued a double purpose: the enlightenment of Jews as human beings, and the enlightenment of Jews as Jews. The Jewish Enlightenment thinkers propagated a new relationship to the world, and to others, from now on, more heed should be paid to social reality and to improving the conditions of Jews in exile. Civil society's discrimination against the Jewish minority was to be stopped. In this regard it was important to take the actual situation into account and to help improve the social life of the Jews so that they could become equal members of society; at the same time Judaism was to become more open to the world. Thus, the second part of the Haskalah's programme aimed to bring about a new and modern religious and theological self-understanding. The Maskilim, the proponents of the Haskalah movement, criticised specific aspects of the religious tradition, especially those customs and rituals that stood in the way of Jewish social integration. Thus, the origin of the tensions between Orthodox and "enlightened" Jews lay in their thoughts on the importance and role of religion in modern Jewish society.

▲7

The process of change initiated by the Haskalah must also be considered in a larger context, since it took place as part of the general social developments of industrialization (→ Media Link #ag), urbanisation, and the growth of bourgeois society. With the dissolution of the traditional structures of Jewish communities and the fragmentation, or indeed individualisation, that this caused, new forms of Jewish life emerged. One of the most obvious results was secularisation which, along with acculturation, affected every area of life: Funeral² and circumcision³ rituals were reformed, and even the development of synagogue architecture reflected the change: Formerly the synagogue had not only been a house of prayer but had also housed a school and a centre for the secular aspects of community life, now it became a sacred house of god.⁴

▲8

In Germany, where Moses Mendelssohn's movement created the conditions for emancipation, the first Maskilim were, in a manner of speaking, also the last, because in Western Europe the Haskalah created assimilated "citizens of Mosaic faith", whereas in Eastern Europe the Haskalah itself became the basis of unique movements. Not all of the different currents of the Haskalah culminated in social assimilation: The effort to preserve the special Jewish character – the goal of national dissimulation – was also part of the effects brought about by this movement. Everywhere European-Jewish "subcultures" developed.⁵ Through filiation or opposition, the Haskalah contributed to the creation of a considerable number of currents which Judaism has been dealing with for more than a century.⁶

▲9

The Haskalah in Berlin

The Haskalah, with Moses Mendelssohn as its spokesman, is often thought to have been at the centre of the changes that took place by the mid-eighteenth century at the latest in Jewish life in Germany. It has been shown that the entire 18th century was characterized by a process of progressive acculturation, although traditionalism remained the model

of reference.⁷ It is highly probable that this change would have taken place even without Mendelssohn, who for a long time was incorrectly regarded as the movement's sole founder.

▲ 10

However, other models must also be taken into account, for example that of Italian Jews (e.g. from Livorno) and of the Sephardim in Amsterdam who developed a particularly successful model based on integration and secular knowledge. One could also think of the Jews in Bordeaux and Hamburg whose active participation in local affairs was acknowledged and valued, and of the Jews who were accepted into Masonic lodges. Jews like the financiers, the purveyors to the German speaking courts, the makers of coins ("moneyers"), in short, all those who, in a manner of speaking, had taken fate into their own hands⁸ belonged to a "semi-neutral society".⁹ From this developing stratum of society which was made up of educated people, for whom religion and class were of minor importance, the proponents of the Haskalah were soon to emerge.

▲ 11

Of particular importance in this context are the social conditions that prepared the way for the development of the Haskalah ideas. These conditions are so characteristic of the era that, in retrospect, leaving the ghetto appears to have been an act of historical necessity.¹⁰ The social structure of the Jewish community changed during the era of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763): A few "new men" who served Frederick II of Prussia (1712–1786) (→ Media Link #aj) – (Daniel Itzig (1723–1799) (→ Media Link #ak), Veitel Heine Ephraim (1703–1775) (→ Media Link #al), and Moses Isaac-Fliess (1708–1776) (→ Media Link #am)) – became quite prosperous. Eventually they attained the status of *parnassim* (community leaders) and gradually came to be the most influential men in Jewish charitable institutions. Their way of life became ever more similar to that of the non-Jewish elite in Berlin – their "Western" appearance, the gradual dropping of Yiddish in favour of German, and the choice of a modern education for their children were unmistakable signs.¹¹

▲ 12

In 1749 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) (→ Media Link #an) introduced the model of the enlightened Jew with his comedy *Die Juden (The Jews)*, although he was fully aware that the model did not yet exist in real life. Some educated men, like Christian Konrad Wilhelm von Dohm (1751–1820) (→ Media Link #ao), argued that if the Jews would be treated justly, they would become useful citizens (*Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden/Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* [1781/1783]).¹² He pointed out that the often criticised moral corruption of the Jews was not the result of their religion but of the oppression they suffered.¹³ Dohm's work, which was based on the one hand on the economic theories of early Liberalism, and on the other, on the humanitarian ideals of the Enlightenment, was written in order to bring about the "profitable" integration of Jews into the economic life of the state through the repeal of the exceptional laws to which, up to that time, the Jews had been subjected in all Christian countries.

▲ 13

In the Habsburg Empire, where the biggest communities of traditional Jews lived, the Enlightened monarch Joseph II (1741–1790) (→ Media Link #aq) took measures to make the Jews "useful citizens" and to integrate them into society. A look at the laws passed under his rule (particularly the 1782 Edict of Tolerance) clearly reveals this intention. However, at the same time, the laws passed in Vienna called into question the autonomy of the Jewish community. The period of reforms under Joseph II was followed by a reactionary period under Francis II (1768–1835) (→ Media Link #ar). Since the German language and culture was an element connecting the multicultural empire, new laws were passed to Germanize the Jews with the intention of using them, in turn, as an instrument of Germanizing the empire's various non-germanic peoples. As a result, the school system became the major challenge for the Habsburg policies regarding the Jews.

▲ 14

The Programme of the Mendelssohn Circle

Moses Mendelssohn played a leading role in formulating the concept of Enlightenment. Already during his lifetime he was referred to as a "Jewish philosopher". However, it would be incorrect to call him a philosopher of Judaism for he only occasionally philosophised on Judaism: in 1770 during the Lavater affair and its aftermath,¹⁴ in his preface to the work *Rettung der Juden (Vindiciae Judaeorum)*, London 1656) written by the Amsterdam Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel

(1604–1657), in his work *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (*Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, 1783), in his dispute with Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) (→ Media Link #as), an orientalist and Protestant theologian at the University of Göttingen, and in his discussion with Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) (→ Media Link #at), a critic of the Enlightenment, and so-called "Magus of the North". However, these sketches of Judaism can be seen as intended for Christians rather than for Jews.¹⁵ Mendelssohn was regarded as a positive example by those who affirmed integration, but as a negative example by those who, despite all the objective historical factors working against it, refused to abandon Jewish isolation.

▲ 15

Among Mendelssohn's priorities was the struggle against what he called "jargon": Yiddish. He viewed it as a mixture of crude and corrupt German and Hebrew and denounced it as the instrument and symbol of obscurantism. As a result of Mendelssohn's critique the language question was taken up by others, for example in the comedy *Reb Henoch oder: Woß tut me damit* (*Reb Henoch or What Will We Do With It?*, 1797)¹⁶ by Isaac Euchel (1756–1804) (→ Media Link #au) and in *Leichtsinn und Froemmelei* (*Levity and Sanctimony*, 1796) by Aaron Wolffsohn (1754–1835) (→ Media Link #av), which parodied and ridiculed the customs and language of Jews living in rural districts.

▲ 16

In this context Mendelssohn published between 1780 and 1782 a German translation of the Pentateuch in transliterated Hebrew and added the so-called *Biur*, essentially a grammatical commentary in which he defended his translation and explained its relationship to the exegetical tradition. This edition of the Pentateuch, which traditionalists at first opposed, was of no small importance; it helped an entire generation of Jews to master German (there were 20 editions in the space of 71 years, always in Hebrew letters, which indicated the existence of a broad consensus – albeit only in German speaking lands). In this way Mendelssohn became the representative of a new direction in Judaism for a broader public: it was he who first raised the question concerning the complete or partial validity of the tradition.

▲ 17

One of the important points of controversy that the Maskilim had to deal with was the binding nature of the *Halakha* (the moral and religious commandments and prohibitions of the Jewish tradition) for an enlightened Jew, as the departure from the tradition often led to a break with it.¹⁷ These religious questions were of interest to the Jewish public until the 1870s. At the heart of the matter was the question of the relationship of religion to secular culture and science. In this regard supporters of the Haskalah pointed to the philosophy of the medieval Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) (→ Media Link #aw) who in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (end of the 12th century) had sought to reconcile Judaism with reason and with the study of the natural sciences. The aim was to demonstrate the ability of the Jews to improve their own customs and to re-interpret Jewish religion and culture.

▲ 18

In his attempt to improve the condition of the Jews, acted as advisor to Dohm when the latter was writing his influential essay and took an active part in the controversy that ensued upon its publication. In 1783 Mendelssohn published *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism* which should not be seen as a philosophy of Judaism but a political treatise.¹⁸ In this work Mendelssohn addressed both Jews and Christians: he wanted to demonstrate to the former that if they wanted to be faithful Jews all they had to do was adhere to the ritual commandments of their own free will, from which it followed that there is no justification for religious compulsion. To the latter he wanted to show that Judaism acknowledges no religious power, and that, therefore, Jews could and should be regarded as equals and as equally valuable members of civil society.

▲ 19

The programme of the Maskilim also called for a reform the Jewish education system that had previously been the responsibility of Polish Talmudists and Rabbis. The elite around Mendelssohn¹⁹ whose members, like David Friedländer (1750–1834) (→ Media Link #ax), Saul Ascher (1767–1822) (→ Media Link #ay) and Lazarus Bendavid (1762–1832) (→ Media Link #az),²⁰ had been recruited from the ranks of the prosperous and progressive-minded Jews in Berlin, waged a resolute and efficient campaign for a new kind of school. In 1778 Friedländer, with the support of his brother-in-law Isaac Daniel Itzig (1750–1806) (→ Media Link #b0), founded the Berliner Freischule (Berlin Free School), the first modern Jewish educational institution based on the idea of secular education. The school was primarily intended for children of the lower social classes who had to pay no fees. The aim of the Freischule was to teach useful

knowledge and skills (especially foreign languages and natural sciences) that would help the children develop into "virtuous citizens and loyal subjects of the state". Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the school taught Hebrew grammar, which was a novelty and therefore provoked a storm of indignation from Orthodox Jews.

▲ 20

With his educational treatise, *Divrei shalom ve-emet (Words of Peace and Truth)*, which appeared in the original Hebrew and in a German translation in 1782, Naphtali Herz (Hartwig) Wessely (1725–1805) (→ Media Link #b1), Mendelssohn's associate in writing the *Biur*, emerged as the Haskalah's spokesman for Jews in the Habsburg Empire, who he exhorted to comply with the reforms of Joseph II. In addition, Wessely was the most important Hebrew writer of his generation. He was primarily known for his poetry and, in this regard, we should note his verse epic, *Shire Tif'eret (Songs of Glory)*, which began to appear in 1782); in a manner of speaking, a Jewish equivalent to Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's (1724–1803) (→ Media Link #b2) *Messias*. As early as 1789 the epic's first four books appeared in a German translation, annotated and authorised by Wessely, under the title *Die Moseide*.

▲ 21

In general the followers of the Haskalah showed a particular interest in the study of Biblical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew Literature and advocated introducing modern disciplines to replace the study of the Talmud. In Königsberg the members of the *Gesellschaft hebräischer Literaturfreunde (Society of the Friends of Hebrew Literature)*, which had recently been founded with the cooperation of Isaac Abraham Euchel, began publishing a monthly journal in 1783, *Ha-Me'assef (The Collector)*, 1783–1812; hence the name *Me'assefim* for the authors who published in this journal), in which biblical Hebrew was glorified. However, this radicalization of the discourse concerning the language issue appeared a bit strange to a readership that was rapidly integrating into German society and whose mastery of Hebrew was waning.

▲ 22

In accord with this social development the first Haskalah journal in German soon appeared: *Sulamith, eine Zeitschrift zur Beförderung der Kultur und Humanität unter der jüdischen Nation (Shulamite, A Journal for the Advancement of Culture and Humanity in the Jewish Nation)*, 1806–1848), edited by David Fränkel (1779–1865) (→ Media Link #b3), the director of the Jewish school in Dessau, and by the teacher Joseph Wolf (1762–1826) (→ Media Link #b4). It tried to mediate between tradition and assimilation.

▲ 23

The Generation(s) Following Mendelssohn

In the years following the publication of Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch, a radicalisation of Enlightenment tendencies took place in the Haskalah that in the end made Mendelssohn appear as a rather conservative figure in the movement. This phenomenon became even more pronounced after Mendelssohn's death. In view of the Prussian government's timid policy of emancipation (equality came only with Napoleon's (1769–1821) conquests: 1808 in Westphalia and 1812 in Prussia), the Maskilim concentrated on the internal Jewish discourse.

▲ 24

Whereas Mendelssohn had attributed the character of revelation to the entire Biblical and Talmudic tradition, including ceremonial laws, and declared them binding for all Jews, his younger followers approached the religious traditions with the instruments of rational and historical criticism.

▲ 25

The second generation of Enlightenment thinkers demonstrated a tendency towards radical deism. A good example is David Friedländer (→ Media Link #b5) who translated the prayer book (*Siddur*) into German in 1786. He also endeavoured to reform the liturgy by removing the songs and prayers that called for the return to Zion (→ Media Link #b7). By 1799 his reform efforts even led him to offer his official conversion to Christianity to the Protestant Chief Consistorial Councillor Wilhelm Abraham Teller (1734–1804) (→ Media Link #b8) (under the condition, however, that he would not have to profess faith in Christ). He also campaigned to introduce organ music into the divine service and to hold the Sabbath sermon in German. These radical positions cost him the trust of community leaders.

Great intellectual adventures, which are undoubtedly the result of the Berlin Haskalah, shaped the 19th century. Despite many differences they shared common characteristics: the rejection of any notion of a return to the ghetto and the striving for a reformation of Jewish identity, which also included a dialogue with the non-Jewish society. The younger generation of Jews that had been influenced by the *Sturm und Drang* movement and raised in the spirit of Romanticism began a systematic and critical research into their historical and cultural heritage. Thus, in 1819, at the initiative of Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) (→ Media Link #b9) the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (The Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews) was founded in Berlin.²¹ In 1854 the Jewish Theological Seminary was established in Breslau. It was headed by Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875) (→ Media Link #ba) and became an important training centre of Conservative Judaism.

▲ 27

In the period between Mendelssohn's death and the founding of the German Empire (1871) the community of German Jews came into being (in the period prior to this one can only speak of Jews from Germany or of Jews who lived in Germany). The process of integrating into German culture reflected the wishes of most members of the German Jewish community. In this regard the famous Berlin salons are often cited as evidence of the mutual respect and appreciation that existed between Jews and Christians. However, the integration that took place in institutions of education, at grammar schools and universities, where Jews were soon over-represented, was more lasting and profound.²²

▲ 28

Jewish secularisation was accompanied by increasing urbanisation; and one may ask, if and to what extent urbanisation was responsible for secularisation. The path out of the ghetto into civil society (Jacob Katz) led from the old Jewish quarters and rural communities to the large cities. Urban life – especially in Berlin with its schools, the university, printers, salons and cafés – provided the necessary conditions for enlightenment, emancipation and secularisation.²³ Thus, the German Jews created a "new" identity, both with regard to their own past, as well as towards Jews in other European countries. In this way the German Jew became the archetype of the modern Jew who has escaped the ghetto and whose life is guided by the principle of community and solidarity with the host country.²⁴

▲ 29

Some proponents of the Haskalah overshot the mark: For some Jews the efforts to integrate led to the surrender of Judaism and to conversion to Christianity – a phenomenon that went hand in hand with the fashion during the Romantic era of converting to Catholicism.²⁵ In actual fact the so-called "baptism epidemic" began at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century and affected about one tenth of Prussian Jews. In the course of the 19th century approximately 20,000 people converted to Christianity. The temptation was especially great in educated circles and in the Berlin elite that was at the centre of salon culture and which included many women.²⁶

▲ 30

The Second Haskalah: "Light against Shadow" in Eastern Europe

During a second wave the Haskalah reached Eastern Europe. Many of the Jews who were more or less respected in the Berlin circles,²⁷ left the Prussian capital to return to their homelands, driven by a sort of messianic enthusiasm. Many of them, like Salomon Maimon (1753–1800) (→ Media Link #bb), Mendl Lefin Satanover (1749–1826) (→ Media Link #bc) and Solomon Dubno (1738–1813) (→ Media Link #bd), were followers of Mendelssohn. However, the German Jews' burning desire to integrate into the German majority society led to the demise of the Berlin Haskalah and shifted the centre of the Maskilim's work to the East (and to a lesser extent to the Habsburg Empire's Italian provinces).

▲ 31

The situation in Eastern Europe (→ Media Link #be) – including Hungary²⁸ – was entirely different from the situation in Central and Western Europe. For the Maskilim the scope for action was much more restricted: On the one hand there was no active support on the part of state authorities or non-Jewish intellectuals, on the other hand, for decades the growing movement of Hasidic Judaism had offered an alternative to integration. However, this adverse situation actually prolonged the life of the Haskalah in the East by preventing rapid and effective assimilation.

In the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe attempts to put Mendelssohn's theory into practice were regarded as "German". In the *Shtetls* the Maskilim were called "Berliners" or "Germans" well into the last decades of the 19th century and, for the pious Hasidim, the name Mendelssohn was anathema.²⁹

▲ 33

The spread of the Haskalah into regions in which the Jewish population made up a substantial minority followed no particular pattern. Although it was the intention of the Haskalah to reach the entire people, in practice the Maskilim approached only to those who had already demonstrated a certain amount of interest in secular affairs. Indications of this can be found in the larger cities and commercial centres such as Tarnopol, Brody, Zamość, Shklov, Lviv or Odessa where the adoption of European habits and the oral and written mastery of Western languages was a question of survival for Jewish traders. In any case the founding of Maskilim groups was more easily accomplished in places where the political authorities had already made provisions for a change in the Jews' conditions.

▲ 34

Here the concept of "Haskalah" fuelled the same debates that it had in Western Europe, but now the opposing positions and attitudes were more pronounced. The goals of the movement, which continued to draw heavily on the philosophy of the German Enlightenment, were to spread the new ideas among the Jews and, at the same time, to strengthen the Jews' love of their own culture. On the one hand they campaigned in the name of reason and the ideal of fraternity for political equality, for improving the living conditions of the masses, and for developing a new culture; on the other hand they emphasised the importance of the Bible and the beauty and purity of the Hebrew language.

▲ 35

Jewish intellectuals in Eastern Europe pursued the goal of emancipating the Jews, but without rejecting the Jewish tradition. Inevitably, their reflections on the place of religion in society and on re-making Jewish identity led to the critique of Hasidism. For the supporters of progress, Hasidism embodied the forces of obscurantism and fanaticism that put a brake on the modernization of Jewish life. In Galicia and in the Tsarist Empire the Haskalah and the Hasidic movements developed in an atmosphere of mutual hate that shines a light on the role of violence in the development of modern Judaism.³⁰

▲ 36

The battle was waged on various fronts. As in Western Europe concrete measures were proposed that were intended to demonstrate the desire to integrate and to eliminate the obstacles that blocked entrance into non-Jewish society: The European style of dress was to be adopted, Yiddish and Jewish first names were to be dropped, and the Halakha was to be interpreted less rigorously. However, the will to contribute to the triumph of a new ideology based on reason, tolerance and freedom of thought led some Maskilim to engage in extreme and aggressive forms of confrontation.³¹ In the East their efforts often took on the features of a cultural war whose main weapon was a propaganda literature that created enduring stereotypes and which also included false accusations and denouncing the opponent to the governing powers.

▲ 37

The bitter struggle of the Maskilim aimed at undermining Hasidic authority and at depriving the *rebbe*s of their legitimacy. On the other hand, as the century advanced, some members of the Maskilim, who were reviled as *apikorsim*, heretics, by Hasidic Jews, became victims of religious fanatics: often their careers in the community administration were ruined.³² Similar tensions characterised the relationship between Reform Jews and Orthodox Jews as an extreme case illustrates: in 1848 an Orthodox fanatic murdered the Lviv Reform Rabbi by poisoning him.

▲ 38

This struggle broke out at a time when the Jewish community's cultural structure had already been changed by the development of new means of communication. And, indeed, the polemics between the Maskilim and the Hasidic Jews were often conducted in the most important modern media: newspapers, magazines, theatres and books.

▲ 39

Alexander Tsederbaum's (1816–1893) (→ Media Link #bf) journal *Kol Mevasser* (*The Proclaiming Voice*, Odessa 1862–1870), published some of the most famous anti-Hasidic novels, written by the younger generation of Jewish writers that included Israel Aksenfeld (1787–1866) (→ Media Link #bg) (*Dos Shterntikhl*, 1861) and Isaac Joel Linetzky (1839–1915) (→ Media Link #bh) (*Dos poylishe yingl*, 1869).

▲ 40

But it would be little more than caricature to present the clash between the Maskilim and Hasidim as merely a cultural war between the "ancients and the moderns", between Orthodox traditionalists and more or less assimilation-minded modernists.³³

▲ 41

In this "struggle between light and shadow", which is the way the Maskilim liked to describe the situation, the complexity of the relationship between the Haskalah and the Hasidim is often ignored. The antagonism that existed between the representatives of the two positions, for instance, resulted mostly from their socio-cultural differences: While the Maskilim came essentially from the urban milieu, many Hasidim were recruited from the impoverished classes of Jews living in rural areas. However, it is also true that the protagonists often came from the same milieu and a part of the elite of both camps shared the same intellectual background. They came from Orthodox families, had fled Talmud academies, and sought solutions that included both continuity and renewal – for Hasidism too can be understood as an attempt to define contemporary Judaism in a new way. It therefore comes as no surprise that – when a more exact analysis is made – a large number of intellectual currents and nuanced discourses emerge. In particular the tensions that existed within the Maskilim circles become apparent.³⁴

▲ 42

A characteristic of many Maskilim sources is the mockery, satire and systematic humiliation of the *rebbe*s and their supporters.³⁵ This kind of hostility is found, for example, in Abraham Ber Gottlober's (1811–1899) (→ Media Link #bi) texts (especially in his autobiography), which emphasize the Hasidim's contempt for handicrafts and trade, and the movement's archaism.³⁶ Some examples of the opposite tendency can also be found, such as Salomon Maimon, a philosopher and follower of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who made an effort to treat the question from a philosophical point of view. But even he denounced the exaggerations of the bigots whose faith, in his opinion, had strayed far from any form of rationality.³⁷ Still, the radical nature of many of the Maskilim's writings led some activists to adopt more nuanced positions. The main representative and spokesman for this tendency within the Haskalah is Jacob Samuel Bick (1770–1831) who accused the Maskilim of arrogance and elitism, and who gradually developed into a defender of the mystical populist movement.³⁸

▲ 43

The most interesting aspect of the anti-Hasidic texts is the ambivalent, ambiguous relationship of the authors with this "sect".³⁹ On the one hand all aspects of Hasidic doctrine and its way of life were denounced, on the other hand a strange mixture of attraction and repulsion, if not outright fascination for Hasidism can also be observed. Frequently, the Maskilim were deeply moved by the beauty of Hasidic stories. Many texts show a great knowledge of the subtleties of the Hasidic masters, for, in order to demask Hasidism, one had first to master the Hasidic sources and understand the movement's teachings. Examples can be found in Joseph Perl's (1773–1839) (→ Media Link #bj) parodies of the collection of legends concerning the founder of Hasidism, (*In Praise of Baal Shem Tov*), and of the history of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810) (→ Media Link #bk).

▲ 44

Nor can the writers of the Haskalah who drew generously on the traditional texts be accused of breaking with tradition but only of having subverted it. They experimented with the modern means of writing and treated the Jewish past critically. From this ambivalent approach a discrepancy grew between their discourse and the sources of the Jewish tradition which left room not only for new themes, but also for a new style of writing, and the aesthetic that went with it.

▲ 45

The language question is a good example for just how broad the spectrum of views was. While some chose the language of the majority (German, Russian or Polish), others defended Jewish particularity by choosing the languages of the Jews, and thus spoke Hebrew or Yiddish – which Mendelssohn had denounced as "jargon".

The further the movement grew away from its German source, the more it developed ties to the Hebrew language, in which the Maskilim of Eastern Europe were able to express their ideas much more elegantly than they could in German. In this way the peculiarity of the Eastern Haskalah emerged. Although the enriched and modernized Biblical Hebrew became the treasure of the Jewish enlightenment thinkers in Galicia and Russian it was not understood by the Yiddish speaking masses of Eastern Europe.

▲ 47

The notion of systematically using Hebrew was contrary to the ambition of winning the entire Jewish people for the modern ideas. And, sure enough, in the course of time, more and more Maskilim began using Yiddish in order to ensure the spread of their programme, a prerequisite of which was a modernization of the language of the common people. The history of the epistolary novel *Megale temirin (Revealer of Secrets, 1819)* by Joseph Perl, the great classic of Haskalah literature, which was reprinted many times, illustrates the conditions of creation and reception under which the Haskalah writers worked. The book was originally written in Hebrew. But since the majority of the potential readers had not mastered the holy language the work was a failure. The author therefore decided to translate it into Yiddish, although the translation was first published after his death.

▲ 48

The fate of Mendel Lefin Satanover's (1749–1826) *Tanakh* translation is equally instructive. This pioneer of the Galician Haskalah, who was among Mendelssohn's first followers, undertook a translation of the Bible into Yiddish in the spirit of Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch. In order to restore poetic power to the Holy Scriptures he translated it in a purified language free of notes and without the comments that traditionally accompanied the Pentateuch. His undertaking should not be regarded as opposing the Hebrew language, but as a strategic attempt to provide the masses, who could not be reached by the obsolete Yiddish *Tanakh* editions of the 16th and 17th centuries, with a more accessible version. But the translation was greeted with such sharp criticism from fellow believers, that Mendel Lefin interrupted his work and dispensed with the idea of publishing it.⁴⁰ It was in this atmosphere of a "Kulturkampf" (culture struggle) that the birth of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature took place.⁴¹

▲ 49

The Situation in Galicia

Galicia which was annexed by the Habsburg Empire in two stages (1772 and 1793) was the Empire's least Germanized province. Yiddish was the mother tongue of the vast majority of Galician Jews. Although the reforms introduced by Joseph II facilitated the realization of the Maskilim's tasks, Galicia was also a stronghold of Hasidism and traditional Judaism.

▲ 50

On the other hand, as early as the end of the 18th century one can speak of Mendelssohn's movement taking root – in a small way – in Galicia. However, efforts to popularize the new ideas via a modern school system or via a reformed form of worship met with little success. In general, the Maskilim's reforms were counted among the many evils that had ensued in the wake of the successive partitions of Poland (→ Media Link #bl); especially when they were imposed upon the Jews with the zeal of a Herz Homberg (1749–1841) (→ Media Link #bm), the unloved (if not hated) superintendent of the German language schools in Galicia and the official censor for Jewish books. A pivotal role was played by Nachman Krochmal (1785–1840) (→ Media Link #bn) who fast succeeded in assembling a group of supporters in Zhovkva. Its members included Solomon Judah Leib Rapoport (known under the acronym "Shir", 1790–1867) (→ Media Link #bo), Joseph Perl, Yehuda Leib Miseses (1798–1831) (→ Media Link #bp), Samson Bloch (1782–1845) (→ Media Link #bq), Joshua Heschel Schorr (1814–1895) (→ Media Link #br), Zevi Hirsch Chajes (1805–1855) (→ Media Link #bs) and Isaac Erter (1792–1851) (→ Media Link #bt).

▲ 51

In 1806 the Austrian regime closed the schools that the first Maskilim had opened. Despite this, in 1815, Joseph Perl succeeded in opening the first of a series of German language schools in Tarnopol. Because of his tireless activity a re-

formed worship service was also introduced in Galicia. The establishment of schools and teaching seminaries was an important focus of the Maskilim's programme. The financial support of rich bankers and factory owners, and the improvement of the political situation, made it possible to create a regular network of secular schools whose graduates hoped for a career in the imperial administration. If in the beginning the primary emphasis had been placed on learning German, gradually, and depending on the region, Polish began to compete with German.

▲ 52

That Galicia is regarded as an important stage in the development of the Haskalah is primarily due to the richness of the literary and journalistic creativity that developed there; and this, in turn, points to the fact that the Haskalah took firm roots in Eastern Europe, while in Western Europe it constituted only a transitional phase. Influenced by various contemporary currents of thought (Romanticism, Hegelianism, Rationalism) a peculiar critique of the tradition developed. The main proponents were Rabbi Solomon Judah Leib Rapoport and the philosopher Nachman Krochmal, and its theses were propagated in periodicals like *Bikkurey Ha-ittim* (*First Fruits of the Times*, 1820–1831), *Kerem Hemed* (*Delightful Vineyard*, 1833–1856) and Isaac Erter's *He-Haluz* (*The Pioneer*, 1852–1889). The synthesis of Judaism that Nachman Krochmal offered in his posthumously published work *Moreh nevukhei ha-zeman* (*Guide for the Perplexed of the Time*, 1851),⁴² was very different from the efforts of the Mendelssohn circle. Krochmal, who was regarded as the "Galician Mendelssohn" by Zunz,⁴³ rejected every form of assimilation and attempted to demonstrate the uniqueness of the Jewish tradition and its enduring nature. He was a pioneer of the critical studies of Jewish history and his work accompanied students of the Jewish sciences throughout the 19th century.

▲ 53

In Galicia, the equivalent of the German language *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (*Science of Judaism*) was *Hokhmat Israel* (*The Wisdom of Israel*), which provided Jewish studies with a new foundation. For the first generations of the Maskilim the close relationship between theoretical assumptions, scientific goals and the social effects of research into the Jewish past, were obvious. Nevertheless, the leanings of the Galician and Russian scholars took their projects in a completely different direction that culminated in an outright criticism of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. While the *Wissenschaft* regarded Judaism purely as its "object of research", its counterpart in the East proceeded from the assumption that the Jewish people constituted a living community whose past – and contemporary – achievements should be analysed. In the course of the 19th century scholarly analysis and the defence of the Jewish minority interwove more closely.⁴⁴

▲ 54

The Galician Haskalah can also take pride in the poet Meir Letteris (1807–1871) (→ Media Link #bu) and in Joseph Perl and Isaac Erter who wrote novels and short stories. Joseph Perl attacked Hasidism with a fanatical and often simplifying vehemence that distorted its principles.⁴⁵ He described the mystical current as a religious epidemic, a kind of mystical pathology that stood in opposition to the fundamental principles of Jewish religion.

▲ 55

In his fictional works, which undoubtedly rank among the most successful works of literature that the Haskalah produced, Perl drew on arguments that he had already developed in his political writings. His most famous work is the story *Megale temirin* (*Revealer of Secrets*),⁴⁶ published in Vienna in 1819; it was followed by the *Bohen tsaddik* (*The Test of the Righteous*) and by parodies of Hasidic fairy tales and stories.

▲ 56

The Situation in Russia

During the Russian stage of the movement the work begun by Moses Mendelssohn was completed and its shortcomings revealed. For here an insurmountable obstacle arose: the milieu into which, according to the Maskilim, the Jews should integrate was characterised by Antisemitism (→ Media Link #bv).

▲ 57

The penetration of the Jewish Enlightenment into Russia was made possible by the efforts of travellers, subscribers to the journal *Ha-Meassef*, and Galician emigrants (after 1820). For the Russian Haskalah, the time of isolated advocates

and widely separated Haskalah-Centres, in which the first Maskilim were supported by wealthy businessmen like Mendel Lefin Satanover, Solomon Dubno or Aaron Mordecai Guenzburg (1795–1846) (→ Media Link #bw), was succeeded by a period of activism that corresponded more or less to the last years of the reign of Nicholas I (1796–1855) (→ Media Link #bx). The challenges the movement faced were primarily economic and social; they mainly concerned educational not religious issues. The learning of foreign languages was often regarded as the first step towards an enlightened life and helped to satisfy the desire for secular knowledge. The spokesman of the Russian or Volhynian (in modern day north-west Ukraine) Haskalah was Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788–1860) (→ Media Link #by), who in his work *Te'udah be-Yisrael* (*A testimony in Israel*, Vilna, 1828) set out a programme of reform for the educational system and the community's structure.

▲ 58

The Maskilim's largest school, and with the most diverse curriculum, was in Lithuania. It is especially noteworthy that here the enlightened forces could build on an older tradition that was in harmony with modern ideas, especially with the principle of the rational exploration of Judaism. This had been the achievement of the Gaon of Vilnius (→ Media Link #bz) (and his successors), who had introduced the study of Hebrew grammar, and the study of the secular sciences that were a pre-requisite for understanding the Talmud, and who had supported the translation of scientific works into Hebrew. Also noteworthy are Aaron Mordecai Guenzburg, the translator Kalman Schulman (1819–1899) (→ Media Link #c0), and the three prominent writers Abraham Dov Lebensohn ("Adam Ha-Cohen", 1794–1878) (→ Media Link #c1), his son Micah Joseph Lebensohn (known under the acronym "Mikhal", 1828–1852) (→ Media Link #c2), and Judah Leib Gordon (acronym: "Yalag", 1830–1892) (→ Media Link #c3). The exceptional talent of Abraham Mapu (1808–1867) (→ Media Link #c4), the father of the Modern Hebrew novel, lent the Russian Haskalah an incomparable splendour.

▲ 59

However, in this regard, the relationship to Yiddish was more ambivalent than ever: Despite its shortcomings the language of the people became more and more essential for the Maskilim who wanted to reach a public that extended beyond their peers. This explains the success of, for example, Mendele Moykher Sforim (1836–1917) (→ Media Link #c5), a master of the Hebrew language, who also wrote in Yiddish and in doing so became the first classical author of modern Yiddish literature.

▲ 60

The Jewish population was so densely concentrated in these areas that the attack on traditional institutions and community leaders had to be carried out with great vigour. The schools became the targets of this struggle, although in retrospect the results were rather meagre. The Maskilim looked to the German and Galician models. Thus in 1822 a school was opened in Uman in the Ukraine, and in 1826 another followed in Odessa – both based on the school that Perl had established in Ternopol. In this area private and public efforts existed side by side. Max Lilienthal (1815–1882) (→ Media Link #c6) and Count Sergei Uvarov (1785–1855) (→ Media Link #c7) are good examples of such interaction: the German speaking Rabbi from Riga was officially commissioned by the Minister for Education (1833–1849) to promote a secular school system in the largest Jewish communities. This commission led to a public debate. Finally, in 1844, a law was passed that opened the state schools to Jews. And, in 1847, two famous rabbinical seminaries were opened, one in Zhitomir and one in Vilna.

▲ 61

Many Maskilim now became civil servants. The reforms of Alexander II (1818–1881) (→ Media Link #c8) consolidated their position, and their presence in key areas lent them social importance. Thus the success of the Haskalah became visible. The movement's theses were published in various languages in such journals as *Ha-melits*, *Ha-tsefirah*, *Ha-Maggid* (Hebrew), *Kol mevasser* (Yiddish), *Dien* and *Voskhod* (Russian), *Jutrzenka* then *Izraelita* (Polish) and supported by the *Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung für Aufklärung unter den Juden in Russland* (Society for the Spreading of the Enlightenment among Jews in Russia) which was founded in 1863. This society was one of the greatest achievements of the Russian Haskalah, for it made the development of Modern Hebrew Literature possible.

▲ 62

Over time three trends emerged:⁴⁷ Some Maskilim declared themselves willing to surrender the citadels of religion and the Hebrew language, advocated complete assimilation, and defended this position in Polish or Russian. This stance could express itself politically in the form of the love of the Tsar or as Polish⁴⁸ patriotism, but it could also lead to revolu-

tionary activism, or to support for the labour movement. Other Maskilim advocated the continuation of the policy of rapprochement by means of education, while the third group emphasized, in Yiddish and Hebrew, Jewish nationality in order to compensate for the Haskalah's shortcomings (and exaggerations). The boundaries between the so-called assimilationists and integrationists are blurry.⁴⁹

▲ 63

The opening of Russian schools to Jewish children in 1844 compelled the Maskilim to establish new schools in order to rescue Hebrew language studies. They introduced a reformed Cheder (a traditional school for Jewish boys) – the *Cheder metukkan*, which prefigured the network of Zionist schools. Although the need for secular education was now generally acknowledged, each group tried to consolidate its own network of schools in order to protect its own values.

▲ 64

The pogroms that followed the assassination of Alexander II (1881) led to the development of alternative strategies that were characterized by a return to Jewish values and the beginnings of a national discourse. This gave rise to the early Zionist *Hibbat-Zion*-(Love of Zion) movement that harshly criticized the Haskalah. Peretz Ben Mosheh Smolenskin (1842–1885) (→ Media Link #c9), one of the leading figures of the Russian Haskalah, accused Mendelssohn of having caused the denationalisation of the Jews, or at least of having paved the way for it.⁵⁰ Smolenskin's view, which he propagated in his journal *Hashahar* (*Dawn*, 1868–1884), the most important Hebrew medium of the late Haskalah and of the beginning Jewish national movement, was similar to the view of history that was propagated by the Zionists – they thought of themselves as returning to the legitimate historical course of the Jewish people by overcoming the concept of assimilation.⁵¹

▲ 65

The goals of the Maskilim were partially or fully realized also in the Russian territories, including such phenomena as Russification or Polonisation and excessive secularisation. The process of maturing and deepening, which the movement underwent during the entire 19th century, was the reason for the severity with which it was judged, both by external critics as well as by its own disappointed supporters: for the Zionists it was too assimilationist, for the various labour movements it was too bourgeois and subaltern, for the advocates of Jewish autonomy in exile it was too Russian, and for the lovers of the Hebrew language it was too artificial.

▲ 66

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Appendix

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Notes

1. ^ See Sylvie-Anne Goldberg's works, especially *La Clepsydre* 2000.
2. ^ Cf. Zürn, *Die jüdische Gemeinde* 2002.
3. ^ Cf. Wolff, *Medizinische Kompetenz* 2002.
4. ^ Cf. Rohde, *Synagogendiskussion* 2002.
5. ^ Sorkin, *The Transformation* 1987.
6. ^ Cf. Delmaire, *La Haskalah* 1994, p. 152.
7. ^ Cf. Schochat, *Ursprung der jüdischen Aufklärung* 2000.
8. ^ In German speaking areas some Jews achieved the status of court Jews, or court factors. Although, as far as chronology goes, they appear to be pioneers of the Jewish Enlightenment, their role should not be overestimated. Scholars agree that the majority of court Jews, especially in Southern Germany, generally had the effect of stabilizing the tradition. It has become apparent that they came to the aid of their brothers in faith only occasionally, and then as mediators or as community leaders in the traditional manner of the *Shtadlan*, the institutionalized spokesman of Jews for Jews. Cf. Ries, *Hofjuden als Vorreiter?* 2002.
9. ^ Cf. Katz, *Aus dem Ghetto* 1986 (Chapter 4, *Die halbneutrale Gesellschaft*).
10. ^ Cf. Katz, *Mendelssohns schwankendes Bild* 1994, p. 350.
11. ^ Cf. Lowenstein, *The Social Dynamics* 1994.
12. ^ Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung 1781/1783*.
13. ^ For France see Abbé Grégoire's (1750–1831) position in regard to this question.
14. ^ The Swiss preacher Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801) publically challenged Mendelssohn either to refute Christianity or to convert to Christianity.
15. ^ Cf. Niewöhner, *Mendelssohn als Philosoph* 1994, p. 292.
16. ^ Isaac Euchel, *Reb Henoch* 2004.
17. ^ Lohmann, *Interkulturalität als Strategie*, without date.
18. ^ Cf. Niewöhner, *Mendelssohn als Philosoph* 1994, p. 299.
19. ^ The fifth volume of the series *Jüdische Bildungsgeschichte in Deutschland* (Behm, *Jüdische Aufklärung* 2002) demonstrates convincingly the importance of the role of the collective in this area.
20. ^ To see which social strata supported Mendelssohn one only has to examine the subscriptions for the publication of his translation of the Bible. Cf. Lowenstein, *The Social Dynamics* 1994, p. 340.
21. ^ Adolph Jellinek (1821–1893) and Moritz Gudemann (1835–1918) developed the Austrian branch of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.
22. ^ On this topic, see Mosse, *Jewish Emancipation* 1985, and Bourel, *Juifs d'Allemagne* 1994, pp. 178f.
23. ^ See the research and reflections presented in the project "Makom. Ort und Orte im Judentum" of the University of Potsdam. Online: <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/we03/forschung/forschungsprojekte/makom/index.html> [18.04.2012].
24. ^ Cf. Bourel, *Juifs d'Allemagne* 1994, p. 179.
25. ^ On this topic, see Lowenstein, *The Social Dynamics* 1994, pp. 343–344; Bourel, *Juifs d'Allemagne* 1994, p. 182.
26. ^ Cf. Hertz, *Die jüdischen Salons* 1991.
27. ^ See the instructive example of Salomon Maimon, a skilled Kantian and an exceptional Talmudist, whose uncultivated Eastern Jewish manners seem to have met with disfavour in the Berlin salons.
28. ^ According to Jacob Katz, however, Hungary was an exception as it skipped the phase of Enlightenment and, with the beginning of modernisation, entered directly in the age of reform and the resulting Orthodox opposition. Cf. Katz, *Mendelssohns schwankendes Bild* 1994, p. 359.
29. ^ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 358.
30. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, p. 171.
31. ^ On this complex issue, see Chapter 3, "Mitnaggedim, Maskilim et Hassidim ou l'enfantement du judaïsme moderne", in: Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, pp. 107–202.
32. ^ Numerous examples and counter examples are given in Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, pp. 134–136, and Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie* 2003, pp. 139–145.
33. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, p. 158.
34. ^ Cf. Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie* 2003, pp. 121–127.
35. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, p. 163.

36. ^ ibidem, pp. 167–168.
37. ^ See Bergman, *Autobiography* 1954, pp. 166–179.
38. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *Naissance du hassidisme* 2006, p. 183.
39. ^ ibidem, p. 174f.
40. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *traduction de la Bible* 1986, pp. 244–252.
41. ^ Shmeruk, *Tsvishn khasides un haskole* 1988, p. 291.
42. ^ Krochmal, *Moreh nevukhei ha-zeman* 1851.
43. ^ Cf. Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1976.
44. ^ Cf. Baumgarten, *Les études juives* 1994, pp. 385–386.
45. ^ Perl, *Über das Wesen* 1977.
46. ^ idem, *Revealer of Secrets* 1997.
47. ^ For this issue, see Delmaire, *La Haskalah* 1994, pp. 164–166.
48. ^ Cf. Wodziński, *Oświecenie żydowskie* 2003, pp. 162–166.
49. ^ For Congress Poland, see ibidem, pp. 168–172.
50. ^ Cf. Barzilay, *Smolenskin's Polemic* 1986, pp. 11–48.
51. ^ Cf. Katz, *Mendelssohns schwankendes Bild* 1994, p. 362.

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
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
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
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
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


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

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
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- Peretz Ben Mosheh Smolenskin (1842–1885) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/42066996>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/124433758>)



-  (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/peretz-ben-mosheh-smolenskin-184220131885?mediainfo=1&width=900&height=500>)
Peretz Ben Mosheh Smolenskin (1842–1885)



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